

Travel Management Implementation on the Inyo National Forest

~~ An Update for 2012 ~~

Over the last two years the Forest Service has been physically implementing a variety of actions that were directed in the Inyo National Forest 2009 Motorized Travel Management decision. The intent of this handout is to update you on the status of the implementation and the plans for 2012.

Brief Background

The planning process for Motorized Travel Management began on national forests across the country about eight years ago, in response to the tremendous growth in off-highway vehicle recreation on public lands. The planning process and subsequent decisions carried out the direction contained in the 2005 National Travel Management Rule. The goal of motorized travel management is to develop and maintain a sustainable system of routes that provide an array of opportunities for access and recreation, as well as protection for natural and cultural resources.

The public was actively engaged every step of the way during Travel Management planning here on the Inyo NF, attending meetings and field trips and providing valuable input into the process. The 2009 decision added over 1,000 miles of new motorized trails and roads to the Forest's system, while approximately 700 miles of unauthorized routes were slated for closure. This resulted in a system of over 2,350 miles of designated roads and motorized trails on the Forest, with about 2,200 miles available to Off-Highway Vehicles.

Front-country areas of the Inyo NF offer great opportunity for high quality recreation experiences. Through the development and maintenance of designated motorized routes there are a multitude of opportunities for motorized recreation as well as motorized access to a wide array of non-motorized recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, climbing, mountain biking and hiking.

How is the Inyo NF Implementing the 2009 Travel Management Decision?

“Implementation” consists of many different types of actions.

The Motor Vehicle Use Map or “MVUM” - Implementation began early in 2010 with the publication of the MVUM. The MVUM is the legal document that is published annually designating a system of roads and trails that are open to motor vehicles. A new version will be released for the 2012 summer season.

Mitigations - Several of the routes that were added to the national forest motorized system require some form of “mitigation”, or treatment, to reduce the adverse effects of roads and trails on natural and cultural resources. Mitigations may include creek crossing stabilization, surface hardening, drainage, barricading, seasonal closures (gates), signage and monitoring. Many of these mitigations, once performed, allow previously unauthorized routes to be added to the MVUM and be opened to motorized vehicles.

Maintenance and Identification of Roads & Trails - A desired outcome of implementation is to make the legal motorized system routes clearly identifiable and navigable by all motorized users. To achieve this, over the last two years and over the next two years, the Inyo NF is focusing on the maintenance of system roads and trails, the signing of open routes, and the blocking and/or disguising of routes that were not added to the system and therefore are now illegal for motor vehicle use. Making route information readily available to users is a high priority for us.

Who is Doing the Implementing?

Work is being accomplished by a wide array of Forest Service personnel with substantial help from volunteers and local groups such as a local Youth Conservation Corps, Student Conservation Association, and others, assisting with implementation. A local stewardship group, “Friends of the Inyo”, obtained a grant from the CA Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division to assist with restoration work as directed in the Travel Management decision. This group, as well as the Eastern Sierra Four-Wheel-Drive Club and others, have helped manage the route system by placing signs, repairing roads and trails and restoring roads under the direction and oversight of Forest Service staff.

Implementation Efforts to Date

Since 2010, several categories of activities have been conducted as part of implementing the Travel Management decision on the Inyo National Forest.

1. Mitigations - Over 60 specified prescribed “mitigation” treatments of roads, trails, or adjacent resources including:
 - 15 barriers to confine use to travel ways to protect adjacent resources
 - 3 gates for seasonal access
 - 23 signs for resource protection
 - 3 meadow stabilization/repairs
 - 8 creek crossings/fords
 - new water bars/drainage on 10 roads and trails
 - hardened surfacing (aggregate) applied to 2 roads
 - Prescribed monitoring
2. Routes added post-mitigation - 31 roads and trails, totaling 20 miles, have been opened for motorized use and added to the Transportation System based on completion of “pre-designation” mitigations. The 2009 decision designated these routes, contingent upon the completion of specific work. Mitigations which can stabilize and open additional routes continue to be a high priority for the Forest.
3. Identification of the Designated System, and closure of unauthorized routes – Signs and barriers have been placed at over 1100 intersections of unauthorized routes to reduce confusion about which roads and trails are legal for motorized use. Some unauthorized routes have been disguised through the placement of brush and rock, and loosening of compacted soils.

Nearly 1,000 route marker signs have been placed on system roads and trails, helping people navigate the designated system, and find their way to recreational destinations. Publication of the 2010 and 2012 Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs) which show legal travel routes have been printed and distributed from Forest offices and visitor centers.

Related work

User Information - Two high quality maps were developed in partnership with the California Trail Users Coalition (CTUC) and the Forest Service, through funding by the CA OHMVR division. These show legal routes throughout the Eastern Sierra, as well as recreational sites, topographic and reference information, difficulty levels of some trails, and highlighted routes. Text includes descriptions of key recreational opportunities, safety and Tread Lightly information, and contacts for emergencies and local agencies. These maps are available at local Forest Service offices and visitor centers at no charge.

Ongoing Maintenance Efforts - Road and trail maintenance continues on approximately 2,200 miles of OHV-legal routes. These are maintained for high-clearance and trail vehicles so management and maintenance are focused on keeping the routes stable, open to the designated use, and preventing resource damage. Obstacles have been removed, waterbars and culverts cleared, signs replaced, and dense overgrowth cut back.

Monitoring and Reporting - Monitoring for route and resource conditions continues. Each year, 20-30% of the motorized transportation system is being formally monitored for compliance with soil conservation plan standards. Informal and random patrols and monitoring for vehicle trespass and compliance occur on the vast majority of the system every year.

Planning for intensive restoration of unauthorized routes – Various on-going planning efforts are focused on complete restoration of closed routes in locations where adverse resource effects will continue even with no motorized use. Proposed activities are being analyzed under the National Environmental Planning Act (NEPA) and include public involvement.

Enforcement and Compliance - Illegal off-route travel is being documented, resource damage is being treated, and tracks are being obliterated. Educational efforts, signage, and blocking of unauthorized routes continue in order to reduce the need for law enforcement action. Vandalism of closures and signs has occurred, as well as illegal driving off of the designated system. This damage is costly to restore or replace, needlessly wasting taxpayer funds and diverting efforts that could be made to improving OHV management. Law enforcement efforts will be stepped up to address violations, especially in areas where vandalism is frequent.

Implementation Focus for 2012

During this third year of travel management implementation on the Inyo NF the focus will be on completing mitigations, blocking unauthorized routes, maintaining roads to standards, signing system routes and planning for the restoration of unauthorized routes where resource conditions or issues warrant further action. In 2012, Forest Service staff will also be monitoring system roads, evaluating resource, road and trail conditions and making recommendations for future actions to improve the route system and mitigate resource concerns.

On the Mammoth and Mono Lake Ranger Districts, emphasis will be given to the signing of system roads, blocking and disguising of unauthorized routes and completion of mitigations in several areas east of Highway 395. The Glass Mountains, Sagehen Summit and Bald Mountain areas are primary focus areas. The Districts will also be re-visiting work areas on the west side of Highway 395 to complete implementation efforts, improve wayfinding and evaluate past implementation efforts. Maintenance is scheduled to occur on the Lookout and Crater Mountain loops, in addition to several other roads.

On the White Mountain and Mt. Whitney Ranger Districts, priority areas for signing, blocking and disguising unauthorized routes and completion of mitigations include Casa Diablo, Tom's

Place, Glass Mountain, and the Westgard Pass area. Mitigation implementation will focus on low complexity mitigations such as signs for resource protection that open routes to public use upon completion. Maintenance of closures and signs will occur throughout the Districts with emphasis on past focus areas such as Coyote Flat and Mazourka. Route maintenance and patrols will also occur throughout the Districts with increased efforts planned for the Monache and Coyote areas.

Ongoing Changes to the System and Emerging Issues

While the Forest does not intend to revise substantial elements of the 2009 decision, Travel Management is a dynamic and continuing process, allowing for changes in the Transportation System when necessary, and as appropriate planning efforts are completed.

In the process of implementing the 2009 decision, Forest Service crews, partners and the public have discovered that inadvertent errors were made in the Travel Management decision. The most common errors stem from inadequate field information about the condition of the routes. In cases where multiple routes accessed the same point, the best or most-used route may not have been designated. Mapping and typographical errors have also resulted in some discontinuous routes or other confusing factors. These issues are being addressed and resolved on an ongoing basis and will be noted in errata to the Motorized Travel Management decision and in site-specific decision documents. The changes will be reflected in the MVUM during updates.

During the initial 2002-2005 inventory process, certain smaller profile routes were missed, and were not analyzed for inclusion in the system. The Forest Service is committed to determining the status, condition and need for these routes and has requested funding through grants from the CA OHMVR Division to conduct further analysis to improve the motorized travel network.

Physical closures of unauthorized routes have occasionally affected non-motorized travelers who can still legally use the routes. While most closures are relatively simple barriers that can be stepped over or bypassed by hikers or mountain bikes, some restoration and disguising methods make travel difficult for short sections. The Forest Service is addressing and correcting these on a site-by-site basis to allow for appropriate non-motorized use

Your Comments, Observations and Suggestions are Welcomed and Encouraged

Throughout the implementation process, the Forest Service, our partners and the public will continue to identify locations where inadvertent errors were made, places where non-motorized users may be impacted, and new opportunities to improve the motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. As a forest user, we encourage you to report your observations, provide feedback and comments and offer suggestions. Your input should be directed to:

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